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SUBJECT: DJIBOUTI/SOMALIA: SENIOR GODJ OFFICIALS ON SOMALIA
DEVELOPMENTS

REF: 09 NAIROBI 1798; 09 ADDIS ABABA 2092; 09 DJIBOUTI 915

CLASSIFIED BY: James Swan, Ambassador; REASON: 1.4(B), (D)

1.(C) Summary: Senior officials who shape Djibouti's Somalia policy expressed cautious optimism about recent developments in Mogadishu. Both Presidency Secretary-General Ismail Tani and Communications Minister Ali Abdi Farah assessed that al-Shabaab and other extremists had lost ground and urged Somalia's Transitional Federal Government (TFG) to capitalize on this opportunity. Commenting on neighboring Somaliland, the Djiboutian officials worried that unless President Riyale compromised with the opposition parties, they would be driven to violence that could be exploited by extremist elements. Hence, the GODJ will support the Ethiopian-led mediation effort in Somaliland. Asked about GODJ plans to deploy a contingent to AMISOM, the GODJ officials confirmed the commitment, but said no concrete action had been taken to prepare the deployment. End summary.

12. (C) Ambassador, along with visiting Somalia Unit Counselor and new Djibouti-based TDY "Somalia Watcher," met separately September 1 and 2 with senior Djiboutian officials involved in Somalia policy: Presidency Secretary-General Ismail Tani and Communications Minister (and former Foreign Minister) Ali Abdi Farah. Both saw developments in Somalia over the past several weeks as favorable for the TFG, although they ascribed this more to loss of support for al-Shabaab than to positive achievements by the TFG (Ref A).

TFG Must Capitalize on Weakened Al-Shabaab

13. (C) Tani described a "positive evolution" in conditions for the TFG in Somalia. Al-Shabaab fighters are "losing support" with their continued violent attacks on other Somalis. Farah concurred that al-Shabaab is currently in "disarray" and has "lost momentum." Both Djiboutian officials urged the TFG to do more to capitalize on this opportunity. Farah said the TFG must focus on security in the capital, both through its own efforts and by getting additional AMISOM forces in place. Tani emphasized the need for further political overtures by the TFG to enlarge its base of support. He said the GODJ favors a smaller TFG cabinet (fewer than 20) of capable individuals reflecting broad clan representation. Sharif's current approach of maintaining a large cabinet paradoxically causes greater competition and dissatisfaction as even minor sub-clans demand posts.

Somaliland Needs Political Compromise

¶4. (C) GODJ officials were concerned about developments in neighboring Somaliland. Not only do the two countries share a border, but Somaliland-centered sub-clans (notably Isaak, Gadabursi, and to a lesser extent Dulbahante) are also significant minority groups in Djibouti. Both Tani and Farah stressed that President Guelleh has personally and repeatedly urged President Riyale to resolve his political dispute amicably. Tani worried that refusal by Rayale to compromise would push the Somaliland opposition "from politics to violence" that could then be exploited by extremists who already have strong ties to Burao and Boroma in Somaliland.

¶5. (C) Farah confirmed that visiting Somaliland Foreign Minister Abdillahi Duale had pressed the GODJ to support the Ethiopian-led mediation in Somaliland. Farah said the GODJ would do so - both at a technical level by providing election and voter registration experts from the Interior Ministry, and at a political level by sending the Chairman of the Parliamentary Justice Committee to support Ethiopian State Minister for Foreign Affairs Tekeda Alemu's mission (Ref B). (Although Farah did not give a name, we believe the committee chairman in question is Abdourahman Hassan Rayaleh, a Gadabursi/Mahadasseh.)

¶6. (C) In a separate conversation August 27, National Security Advisor Hassan Said Khaireh played down the current political dispute in Somaliland as typical pre-election posturing. Alluding to the close security relationship between the Djiboutian and Somaliland services, Hassan said Djibouti is grateful that Somaliland continues to act as a buffer between Djibouti and the violent extremists in southern Somalia. Farah echoed this appreciation for Somaliland's role in protecting Djibouti.

No Movement on Djiboutian Deployment to AMISOM

¶7. (C) Asked about GODJ plans to provide approximately 400 troops to AMISOM (Ref C), all three interlocutors (Tani, Farah, Hassan) confirmed the commitment but said no concrete steps had been taken to prepare the deployment. Our Djiboutian contacts maintain that any deployment must be preceded by an African Union decision to permit Somalia's immediate neighbors to contribute troops, which they say the current AMISOM mandate does not.

Comment

¶8. (C) Djibouti is 60 percent ethnic Somali (including its senior leadership) and has played a key role in supporting the TFG and President Sharif. Djiboutian officials such as Tani, Farah, and Hassan are a useful bellwether for assessing developments in Somalia.
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